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ABSTRACT

The National Center for Children in Poverty was initiated to strengthen programs and policies for the 5 million children under the age of 6 and their families who live in poverty in America. In this, address the director of the National Center for Children in Poverty summarizes some of the statistics on poverty in Texas and in the nation and outlines research-backed characteristics of education that are relevant to children at risk. Among these are the following: (1) the learning of a new language should be viewed as additive, not as a substitute for a native language; (2) teacher responsiveness is integral to learning; (3) standards and warmth are important components of teaching effectiveness; (4) parent involvement enhances the school environment; (5) shared decision-making at the school level can create an improved environment for teaching and learning; (6) teacher enablement is critical to improving schools; and (7) schools need to respond to family needs and working mothers. Examples of these factors in practice are cited. (13 references) (MLF)

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CHANGING NEEDS FOR A CHANGING FUTURE:

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THE NEED FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Judith E. Jones

EA 021 598

NATIONAL CENTER FOR CHILDREN IN POVERTY

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Changing Needs For A Changing Future: The Need For Educational Leadership

Judith E. Jones

This speech was delivered on June 14, 1989, in Austin, Texas, as the keynote address for the Texas Education Agency's Leadership Seminar on Special Programs. Judith E. Jones is Director of the National Center for Children in Poverty at Columbia University in New York City, and is Associate Clinical Professor in Columbia's School of Public Health.

I am delighted to be here with you this evening and to be part of the opening session of this very important seminar. I am sure that many of you in this room feel that Texas' problems in education are bigger than life, but the challenges to educational leadership in this state reflect the challenges facing the entire country.

"The Times They Are A Changing." Certainly this is a time of shifting demographics, increasing poverty, and changing community needs. All these changes, singly or together, require thinking about old problems in new ways. For all of us who are dedicated to the well-being of children, we need to understand the new realities and ask of ourselves what we ask of our children every day—to be willing to listen, to embrace new ideas, and to integrate those new ideas into lifelong learning. This is not easy for children, and it is not always easy for us. And for those children who need our special attention—the children for whom your programs are

designed—our need to grasp the reality of their lives is even greater, if these programs are to be effective.

On a national basis, at-risk children are at risk because of poverty, societal attitudes, family structure, and the inadequate and sometimes dangerous environments in which they live. There are 13 million poor children under eighteen in this country, and there are many more I would consider "at risk." Those at risk are likely to be a minority: Almost half of all black children under eighteen are poor, and almost 40 percent of Hispanic children in this age group are poor. In Texas, 85 percent of the children living in poverty are black and Hispanic.

...."POVERTY, NOT ETHNICITY,

DETERMINES FAILURE

TO GRADUATE FROM HIGH SCHOOL..."

Nearly half of the poor children in America have mothers who did not complete high school. Nearly half have mothers who began having children as teenagers. The percentage of children living in mother-only families has more than doubled in the past fifteen years. Also, it is estimated that over 40 percent of the children born in this country will live in a single-parent family at some time before they reach their eighteenth birthday. We know that families who do not have the benefit of two wage earners are poorer. Nonetheless, over half of all poor children under six live in families in which at least one parent is in the labor force but is earning such low wages that he or she cannot raise the family out of poverty.

Poverty also means that a child is more likely to have a poor start early in life—because of inadequate prenatal care for the mother, low birth weight, and/or lack of

appropriate nutrition and medical care. Moreover, poor parents, due to their own limited schooling, may not be able to provide the enriched learning experiences that foster successful entry into school. In some cases parental stress and depression create an environment that does not promote healthy childhood development.

A recent report from the Texas Department of Community Affairs stated to the legislature: "Poverty, not ethnicity, determines failure to graduate from high school." Many poor children who drop out of school do so to earn money for themselves and their families. The irony, of course, is that they are more likely to remain poor if they drop out of school, since most jobs of the 21st century—just eleven short years from now—will require education beyond high school. For minorities the situation is even bleaker, since Hispanics and blacks are overrepresented in those low-skill jobs that are likely to disappear between now and the year 2000. At the same time, it is estimated that 43 percent of the new entrants into the work force between now and the year 2000 will be minorities.

The national minority dropout rate is astounding—with 30 percent of high school students dropping out before they graduate—and in Texas, the attrition rate is 45 percent for Hispanics and 34 percent for blacks. The paradox, of course, is that these minority groups, on whom this nation's future economy depends, are the groups that often experience the most difficult life circumstances and obtain the least educational preparation.

But there is hope, and that is why your efforts to assure a productive future for these children and this country are so critical. From my perspective, statistics are useful only to the extent that they illuminate the issues. They can help us better direct our energies and resources in order to seek and find solutions to our problems.

Texas is committed to educational reform, and the country is watching. The state's goals are worthy, and they are challenging:

- Improved student performance
- Retaining and attracting effective teachers
- A well-balanced curriculum
- Efficient management and organization
- Parents as partners
- Equitable financing
- Innovation

Everyone here tonight has clearly accepted these challenges. But what kind of reform is relevant to children at risk—and what must happen to make these goals a reality? The type of reform I suggest is one that isn't solely concerned with credentials or a didactic curriculum—but with creating bonds between and among children, parents, and teachers.

.... THE PREPARATION FOR LEARNING

THE CHILDREN RECEIVE AT HOME. . .

MAY DIFFER FUNDAMENTALLY FROM

THE PREPARATION THAT

TEACHERS ASSUME

THEY HAVE RECEIVED....

I would like to share with you what researchers, other educators, and many dedicated professionals in the public and private sectors are saying and doing.

It is not just poverty that puts children at risk. As a University of California researcher has observed, an important cause of the high incidence of school failure is the fact that the preparation for learning the children receive at home—or do not receive—may differ

fundamentally from the preparation that teachers assume they have received. For example, in some cultures children are trained to learn through observation; their parents emphasize social development within a broad extended family network. These children will not have an easy time adjusting to school situations that are highly structured.

In addition, it is increasingly apparent that the United States is not only increasingly multiethnic but also multilingual. A colleague recently reported that in the Los Angeles school district 40 languages, including dialects, are spoken. Moreover, no one ethnic group is a monolith. Too often we have ignored subgroup differences in language and culture. Spanish-speaking children in New York City, where families are from the Dominican Republic, or Puerto Rico, or Cuba, for example, are not speaking the exact same language as Mexican-American children in San Antonio. Their community and family contexts are likely to be very different as well.

What does this mean for children who do not speak English? How can they learn? And how can educators teach? Language development for the young is key. Educators cannot be expected to know a myriad of languages, but in an increasingly international world, and with multilanguage usage in this country, we should develop a variety of language bases, not curtail them.

American educators should view the learning of a new language as additive, not as a substitute for one's native language. At a 1988 workshop convened by the National Center for Children in Poverty, more than twenty Latino experts debated "School Readiness and the Hispanic Child," concluding that the concept of school readiness should be recast. The question is not, Is the child ready for school? but rather, Is the school ready for the child? It is not just poverty that

THE QUESTION IS NOT,

IS THE CHILD READY FOR SCHOOL?

BUT RATHER, IS THE SCHOOL

READY FOR THE CHILD?

puts children at risk in America. It is also a failure to bridge the cultural and social divide between home and school.

What does this perspective mean for our current modes of teaching? We need to remember that teacher responsiveness is integral to learning and that learning does not occur in a vacuum. Many factors contribute to academic achievement. For young children from different backgrounds, it means a greater emphasis on experiential learning. It also means putting the students into groups small enough to be managed by the teacher. I have read about a program called Wings in Lubbock, Texas, that incorporates this approach. Is it working? What are the problems? More important, what lessons can be learned?

....THERE IS ALSO GROWING EVIDENCE

THAT THE INVOLVEMENT

AND CARING OF EVEN ONE ADULT

IN THE LIFE OF AN AT-RISK CHILD

CAN PREVENT

LIFELONG DISADVANTAGE....

There is also growing evidence that the involvement and caring of even one adult in the life of an at-risk

child can prevent lifelong disadvantage. The work of Gary Natriello and Sanford Dornbusch at Stanford's School of Education underscores the importance of teachers who facilitate student learning by presenting standards with warmth. They conclude that both standards and warmth are important components of teaching effectiveness.

....TEACHER RESPONSIVENESS

IS INTEGRAL

TO LEARNING....

Many of these ideas are already being implemented across the country and in programs in this state of Texas. Yet, as a recent report from the Hogg Foundation stated, "If Texas is to reach its goal of a 5 percent dropout rate by the year 1998—much more, much, much more will have to be done."

To meet the needs of the children we want to help, financial resources will have to be provided equitably. Building human capital will have to be defined to include both students and teachers. Nationwide, we spend $185 billion a year on primary and secondary schools, but teacher salaries overall are barely above their 1971 level. Financial resources alone will be insufficient to respond adequately to the urgent needs of children. At its foundation, implementing reform will call for changing attitudes—adapting the ways we organize ourselves, acknowledging the role of schools as partners with parents and communities, and valuing our educators so that they have the support they need to teach—so that all our children can learn.

The research is clear, recently enhanced by a greater understanding of what constitutes an effective school environment in which teaching and learning can occur.

Parental Participation

Engaging parents in school activities is known to be important. Yet overburdened school administrators and teachers may feel that the task of organizing and arranging for increased parental involvement is just one task too many. But those schools that have reached out to their communities have reaped big rewards. By encouraging parents to be involved, teachers and school administrators alike have found that the school environment is enhanced, that children are more responsive, and that teachers flourish when they work in a positive atmosphere that fosters educating and learning.

....THOSE SCHOOLS

THAT HAVE REACHED OUT

TO THEIR COMMUNITIES

HAVE REAPED

BIG REWARDS....

One example of such involvement is the school development program initiated at two inner-city elementary schools by James Comer of the Yale Child Study Center in New Haven, Connecticut. This program is now being replicated at fifty schools around the country. The program, begun over fifteen years ago to combat school failure and severe disciplinary problems, provides important insights into how we must approach reform for our at-risk children. Rather than define reform in terms of teacher credentialing, didactic instruction, and curriculum, the New Haven program decided to focus on developing supportive bonds that empower children, parents, and the school. It became obvious that the differences between the

home environment and the school environment were affecting the psychosocial development of these children, which in turn shaped their behavior and academic achievement.

....A CLIMATE THAT FOSTERS

HEIGHTENED EXPECTATIONS OF

STUDENT PERFORMANCE

HAS TO BE LINKED

BETWEEN HOME AND SCHOOL

— BUT THE LOCUS OF REFORM

IS IN THE SCHOOL....

To bridge the gap between home and school in a manner that respected a diversity of culture, language, and learning styles, parents in this Yale program became involved as classroom assistants and volunteers to coordinate after-school activities. They were encouraged to see that homework was done and to participate as members of a school governance committee composed of teachers, administrators, and the Yale group—a collaboration that energized the entire school.

This did not happen overnight; it took time to build trust. The program began in a "no-fault atmosphere" in which all concerned agreed that no single group was at fault and that no single initiative taken by itself would make the difference. The outcome? The academic performance in the schools exceeded the national average, and truancy and disciplinary problems declined dramatically.

Lester C. Thurow of MIT said recently, "The big reason for Asian-American success in public schools is family; family means some parent telling you that education is important." A climate that fosters heightened expectations of student performance has to be linked between home and school—but the locus of reform is in the school. Therefore schools must reach out to parents. Too many parents view schools as places where they are called to discuss problems. For some, schools are places where they themselves failed to achieve rather than places of joy.

Some schools are reaching out to parents in many creative and important ways—from involving parents in a range of school activities, as in the Comer program, to sponsoring events at the beginning of the school year rather than the end; and, at the minimum, planning social events at the school and using school buses to get the parents there. All parents, but particularly those who feel isolated and alienated, must be made to feel welcome in the schools if they are to assume greater responsibility for their children's educational outcomes. In many cases the parents of at-risk children need as much support as their children do. Schools have an important role to play here. Among the many models are those that aim to increase the literacy of parents and their children in joint programs.

Missouri's Parents as Teachers program, which can also be found here in Texas, is another example. In this program, parents who are expecting a baby receive education and support services from the prenatal period through the child's third birthday. This approach enables all parents, not just those at high risk, to enhance their children's intellectual, language, physical, and social development. The approach also recognizes that the dropout process begins long before school entry. Reaching parents early is key, because the process that contributes to school success begins

at birth. Many children drop out before they drop in. The seeds of failure are sown very early, and early intervention is critical.

....MANY CHILDREN

DROP OUT

BEFORE

THEY DROP IN....

Project Help for Parents in Los Fresnos has the same goal as the Missouri program, with a parent resource center, and school- and home-based parent-training sessions for families of elementary-school-age children. I have heard of a Brownwood, Texas, program that focuses on enriching the home environments of low-income parents of children from birth to age six—parents who themselves have dropped out of school. A similar effort in San Antonio is using television to improve parents' literacy skills as well as share ways to help them improve their children's education. State education agencies support many other programs, such as the Minnesota Early Childhood and Family Education (ECFE) program that provides a host of services in more than 300 of the state's 435 districts. There, parent and family education takes place in several ways: during home visits; through lending libraries of books, toys, and other learning materials; and by way of special events organized for the entire family.

Efforts such as these represent a way of thinking that says, "We're all in this together," and "Everybody counts—students, parents, teachers, and administrators." These activities demonstrate what the

May 1989 newsletter of the Intercultural Development Research Association describes as the "valued parent model." Yet two-thirds of the school districts in this state alone do not have such programs! Since there is mounting evidence that parent involvement does improve student performance, why doesn't it occur more broadly?

Shared Decision-Making

Many school district leaders throughout the country are realizing, as did the Yale Study Group, that if schools are to be more effective, they must examine the organizational context in which they operate. The corporate world recognized this many years ago: effective business requires that decision-making reside not solely at the top, but become a shared undertaking that evolves at the operations level.

Thirty-three of the public schools in Dade County, Florida, have volunteered to participate in a school-based management-shared decision-making model. These schools are making their own decisions and are involving students and parents. The long-term goal is to improve student achievement and the quality of teaching and educational administration. Here teachers and principals are changing old rules and creating new ones. By getting waivers of local school board rules, teacher-union contract provisions, and state department of education regulations, they have redesigned almost every aspect of their schools—from the kinds of textbooks selected to instructional plans. They are restructuring the school day and creating smaller classes. The schools report directly to the state's central office, and they make their own decisions on how to allocate funds within their programs. Parents and other community representatives participate as advisers and helpful partners.

It is not school restructuring for its own sake that counts. Rather, the goal is to create an improved environment for teaching and learning. And not all the changes will work perfectly or immediately. The important factor is the willingness of all of us to examine what we are doing so we can identify those areas amenable to change—those areas that can make a difference for schools and for children.

....THE IMPORTANT FACTOR IS

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A *Newsweek* article in the June 5, 1989, issue was written by a high school teacher in Florida. Her description of her school's conditions cried out for new approaches. "It's seventh period and I'm exhausted. So are my students. We struggle through the same lesson I presented first period. Because this is the third time today I'm leading this same discussion, I find it difficult to get enthusiastic about it. Only a few students take notes; only a few turn in their homework."

What a dreary scenario! If a teacher feels that disheartened, what does she communicate to her students? Teacher attitudes and behavior toward student learning are important. What is the educational system doing to support teachers?

Supporting Teachers

One of the most prominent themes in school restructuring is teacher enablement. This is critical to improving our schools, and it is critical for addressing teacher supply and demand as well. If teachers do not feel valued, how can we expect them to value students? The "schools within schools" concept and other similar organizational concepts are not new. What is new is that many more schools are recognizing that they do have the capacity to be effective agents for change. But, if change is to occur, strong leadership at the school and district level is equally important.

Realistic time frames must also be recognized. A teacher in the Rochester, New York, school system stated, "All of a sudden, [the program] was just implemented and we had no preparation." This comment was in response to the criticism that even with greatly enhanced salaries, teachers did not perform well in the recently instituted Rochester program.

According to a recent report of the Committee on Economic Development, which is composed of business leaders, our school system was developed to meet the needs of a newly industrialized nation and was modeled on the factories in which students were expected to work. We all know that factories have had to change to survive, and so must the schools.

What support do teachers need to respond to a changing environment? Like many of us caught up in our daily routines, teachers have little access to new knowledge and new approaches. That is why this conference is so essential. Knowledge is power, and sharing knowledge creates a synergy that can be felt throughout one state and beyond. Teachers need support in an ever-changing and complex environment,

and if our children are to succeed, our teachers must succeed.

Pacific Oaks College in California is working with the Pasadena Unified School District to enhance teaching roles in state-subsidized prekindergarten programs for language minority children. The college is helping teachers address the issues of language development among poor young Hispanic children, some of whom are newly arrived immigrants while others are from undocumented families. Since the district has few dollars for in-service training and staff development activities, the college is providing resource consultants to work right in classrooms to help teachers solve problems directly. Unfortunately, there are too few examples of these creative approaches.

....TEACHERS NEED SUPPORT IN AN

EVER-CHANGING AND COMPLEX ENVIRONMENT,

AND IF OUR CHILDREN ARE TO SUCCEED,

OUR TEACHERS MUST SUCCEED....

Rigid environments hold teachers captive as well as children. One approach to this problem is called the Accelerated School Project for at-risk elementary school students who would ordinarily be placed in compensatory education programs. This approach, pioneered by Henry Levin at Stanford in 1987, is still too new to have definitive results, but teachers and principals are pleased with the early reports. Professor Levin emphasizes a faster learning pace (usually reserved for gifted students) and teaching techniques that engage students energetically as active learners. Each school district adopting the program is urged to build on its own strengths. The guidelines emphasize

that the school environment must support a unity of purpose that includes:

- A clear set of goals that includes bringing all students up to grade level by the end of elementary school;
- A school assessment program that assures that all students are meeting the set goals;
- A curriculum that emphasizes language-based and higher-order thinking skills, including analysis and problem solving;
- Permission for teachers to design the curriculum;
- An extended day program for both academic and recreational activities.

This initiative incorporates many of the principles that I identified earlier, but it adds an important new one that reflects the changing reality of the increasing numbers of mothers in the work force—the extended school day. The schools of the 21st century, to quote the renowned psychologist Edward Zigler, must be centers of community life, and they are needed to provide the cement that will hold families together.

Responding To Family Needs And Working Mothers

In 1985, 70 percent of children aged 6 to 14 nationwide had working mothers, and it is estimated that by 1995, two out of three preschoolers in Texas will be the children of mothers who work.

While we can debate the appropriateness of children in care outside the home, the overall trends in America

point to a growing number of women in the labor force. Women work out of economic necessity, either as the sole support of their children or to provide the additional income necessary to meet family needs; and they work full-time.

Given the lack of available and affordable full-time care for children, it is not surprising that even now it is estimated that 30,000 Texas children under the age of six are left to care for themselves while their parents work.

What are the implications of these trends for children? For at-risk children in particular, the harmful effects can be quite serious. Children left unsupervised fall prey to many negative influences in an already unstable environment.

Responding to a recent Harris poll, teachers said they believe that one of the most critical factors undermining school performance is the fact that children are left alone after school hours. More than 60 percent of the teachers blamed the parents, and the parents interviewed in the survey agreed with the teachers!

Last year, in a survey conducted by the National Association of Elementary School Principals, two-thirds of 1,200 principals reported a need for before- and after-school child care. In Wisconsin the Department of Public Instruction has successfully petitioned the state legislature to issue a waiver that would allow schools to use space for on-site child care. Edward Zigler's school-based child care model, providing on-site child care for three- and four-year-olds and early morning and after-school care for six- to twelve-year-olds, has already been replicated in two Missouri school districts. Initial funding for start-up costs has come from the Missouri Department of Education and three local community foundations.

Parents using the before- and after-school program pay $23 a week, with lower charges for less use. Full-time day care for preschoolers costs $45 a week. Poor parents receive privately-funded assistance to enable their children to participate. While the principal remains the chief school administrator, each of these programs has a full-time coordinator.

School-based comprehensive health clinics, of which there are now almost 150 across the country, were initiated in Texas almost twenty years ago. While most are situated in high schools, an increasing number are appearing in middle schools. A model program in New York City combines comprehensive health, social services, and academic support for at-risk community teenagers. Funding for these efforts is a mix of private foundation grants, the United Way, federal money, and state education budgets.

....ALL OF THESE SCHOOL OUTREACH

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THAT SCHOOLS DO NOT

FUNCTION IN ISOLATION....

All of these school outreach efforts are examples of the growing recognition that schools do not function in isolation. By meeting community needs and the special needs of at-risk children, we enhance rather than detract from the educational mission of our schools.

Our focus at this conference is on at-risk children—children at risk because of poverty, societal attitudes, family structure, and inadequate and sometimes dangerous neighborhood environments.

These children, like all children, need nurturing from their parents, their schools, and our society. This nurturing ideally begins before birth and continues in a stable, caring environment at home that prepares the child for the larger world outside. For many children, even for many poor children, this happens. But for too many others—across all socioeconomic levels and ethnic groups—this does not happen. For those of us committed to children, there is no choice but to work to change their lives for the better.

I still remember my second grade teacher who cared about me. I remember little about the specifics that Mrs. Beam taught, but I do remember holding her hand on the way to assembly. The children we are talking about here deserve a hand, too. As a school district leader said, we need an educational environment in which "every teacher is a leader, and every principal is a teacher, and every child is a success."

James Agee once wrote that "in every child who is born, no matter what the circumstances and no matter who the parents, the potentiality of the human race is born again."

It is up to us, through our creativity and our willingness to accept the challenges of the present and the future, to ensure that the potential of every child is realized.

The National Center for Children in Poverty was initiated to strengthen programs and policies for the five million children under six and their families who live in poverty in America. The Center assesses public and private sector initiatives in the areas of early education and child care, maternal and child health, and social support to poor families.

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